

# Helping Youth Succeed

**Utah State**  
**UNIVERSITY**  
**EXTENSION**

FL/Youth/NL-06



## SOCIAL SKILLS

*"The more personal skills a child has, the more likely it is that he or she will grow up healthy."*

Peter L. Benson, Ph.D., What Kids Need to Succeed

*In order to make good choices and grow to be healthy, well-adjusted adults, youth need to have good social skills. Social skills are behaviors which improve one's personal interactions with others and which help with decision making. Developing and using good social skills is important for people of all ages, but is especially critical during the teenage years. This newsletter discusses five key social skills, or social competencies, and offers suggestions for parents, teachers and other adults to reinforce these social skills as they work together to help youth succeed.*

Youth need to be able to set goals, plan how to achieve them, and then manage themselves and their time in such a way that those goals become reality. Good decision-making skills are an essential part of this process, and youth must be given opportunities to develop these skills.

**PLANNING &  
DECISION MAKING**

☑ **PARENTS:** Help your youth set realistic short and long-term goals, and talk about their progress. Hold family planning meetings regularly. Invite family members to share their upcoming activities and coordinate schedules as needed. Teach youth how to use a "to-do" list and prioritize tasks and projects.

☑ **SCHOOLS:** Use class assignments as opportunities to teach organizational skills, for example, when assigning a research project, break down the assignment by task, assign due dates for each step, provide a checklist for students to follow. Discuss career planning, and ask

students about current choices they are making that may affect a desired career path.

☑ **CONGREGATIONS:** Involve youth in planning their own programs, and give them meaningful assignments related to their activities.

☑ **COMMUNITY LEADERS/NEIGHBORS:** Sponsor career fairs or career days for local youth. Youth can be invited to participate in "job shadowing" activities, where adults teach youth about a chosen career or vocation, and discuss the education, training and skills that are necessary for that vocation.

**INTERPERSONAL  
SKILLS**

Making and keeping friends is an important skill for youth, and one that must be practiced. It involves skills such as being sensitive to the emotions of others, being able to empathize, and recognizing and understanding one's own feelings and emotions.

☑ **PARENTS:** Talk to your youth about relationships and ask them to describe what it takes to be a good friend. Model these behaviors in your own friendships. Parents can also be good role models for empathy, as they try to see things from their youth's point of view and discuss his or her problems from a different perspective. Youth will appreciate the gesture and will learn to empathize with others as well.

☑ **SCHOOLS:** Group projects and other group classroom assignments give youth great opportunities to learn to work together, and develop better interpersonal

skills. After school informal discussion groups can focus on relationships and the challenges youth face in maintaining good friendships.

☑ **CONGREGATIONS:** Organize a panel discussion for a youth activity. Include youth and adult panelists who could field questions and discuss friendship, dating, and other relationship issues. Find ways to expose members of the congregation to other cultures and peoples, possibly through service projects or other sharing activities.



Today's youth are living and learning in a world that is quite different from their parents' world. They need to have skills to deal with people who come from diverse cultural, ethnic, economic, and religious backgrounds.

**CULTURAL  
AWARENESS**

☑ **PARENTS:** Youth need to develop an awareness of their own cultural heritage, to help them become competent in dealing with people from a variety of cultures. Teach your youth about your family's heritage -- talk about your traditions, holidays, language, and other things unique to your culture. Encourage your youth to feel proud about their heritage, without feeling superior or inferior.

☑ **SCHOOLS:** Teachers can help students appreciate and understand diversity and increase their sensitivity by showing them how other people and cultures live. Classroom presentations could include guest speakers, documentaries, and students could celebrate cultural holidays, and sample ethnic foods.

☑ **COMMUNITY LEADERS/NEIGHBORS:** Sponsor a heritage fair or other cultural event to celebrate the

community's diversity. Invite representatives from the community to demonstrate their native music, dance, food, etc. Be sure that minority groups are represented on city committees, authority boards or neighborhood councils.



Resisting negative peer pressure can be one of the most difficult, yet most important things a youth can do. Saying "no" in dangerous situations and being able to avoid negative peer pressure on an ongoing basis is a key to a happy, healthy youth.



☑ **PARENTS:** Parents can become strong allies by simply listening to their youth. Encourage your teenagers to talk about their feelings and frustrations about the pressures they are facing. Discuss different ways to say no (walk away; calmly say no; use humor; etc.) and talk about situations to avoid (being asked to ride with someone who has been drinking; being pressured to have sex; being invited to an unchaperoned party; etc.)

☑ **SCHOOLS:** Make the commitment to be a drug-free school, and support resistance education programs. Teach resistance skills and assertive behavior in health classes using modeling and role-playing activities.

☑ **CONGREGATIONS:** Provide healthy activities for youth, and help them feel a sense of belonging within the congregation and youth group. Encourage youth to use religious teachings as a resource in resisting negative peer pressure and avoiding dangerous situations.

☑ **COMMUNITY LEADERS/NEIGHBORS:** Sponsor seminars and workshops that teach assertive behavior to youth, and then involve older youth in sharing resistance/assertiveness skills with younger

students. Enforce laws that govern underage drinking and tobacco, supporting strict penalties for vendors who break the law.



Youth need to know the importance of resolving conflicts

without violence. Families and teachers can help youth learn basic conflict resolution skills, and can then help youth identify and solve conflicts in constructive, peaceful ways.

☑ **PARENTS:** Teach your children that violent behavior such as hitting, kicking, shoving are **not** acceptable behaviors and are **not** allowed in your home (that goes for adults too!). Practice problem solving strategies that include: 1) identify the conflict or problem, 2) listen to everyone involved and try to understand their needs, 3) have those involved brainstorm creative solutions to the problem, and 4) choose a solution that is a "win-win" for those involved. Communicate openly as a family, solving smaller problems before they get to be big ones!

☑ **SCHOOLS:** Organize a conflict resolution team, consisting of students and a teacher or counselor. Train students on problem-solving skills and techniques and involve them in settling disputes and

conflicts with other students. Do not tolerate violence in the school -- all students must feel that school is a safe

☑ **CONGREGATIONS:** Teach youth about people from your religion's history, or other significant world leaders who practiced peace, and solved problems in a peaceful manner (for example, Ghandi).

☑ **COMMUNITY LEADERS/NEIGHBORS:** As part of community adult education programs, consider classes on conflict resolution or problem solving. Support community organizations whose mission is to prevent domestic violence abuse. Publicly recognize members of the community and organization leaders who are working for safe, peaceful neighborhoods.



✂️CLIP AND SAVE✂️



### Parents' To-Do List

1. Post a family calendar in the kitchen with room for kids to write their weekly activities.
2. Talk to my youth about our family's culture and heritage.
3. Throw a pizza party for my teen, and ask her to invite her friends over.
4. Listen to my youth's frustrations and help brainstorm solutions to the problems.
5. Make time for fun!

**HELPING YOUTH SUCCEED** is produced by Utah State University Extension and the Utah State Office of Education and based on research by the Search Institute. Special thanks to newsletter editor, Tami Pyfer, M.Ed., and contributing authors Dr. Thomas Lee and Dr. Glen Jenson, Utah State University.

Additional information about implementing the Developmental Assets can be obtained from:

- Search Institute, 700 South Third Street, Suite 210, Minneapolis, MN, 55415, or 1-800-888-7828, or <http://www.search-institute.org>
- Utah State University Extension, Department of Family & Human Development, College of Family Life, Logan, UT 84322-2905 or 435-797-1543
- Utah State Office of Education, Center for Families in Education, 250 East 500 South, Salt Lake City, UT 84111 or 801-538-7723

Utah State University Extension is an affirmative action/equal employment opportunity employer and educational organization. We offer our programs to persons regardless of race, color, national origin, sex, religion, age or disability. Issued in furtherance of Cooperative Extension work, Acts of May 8 and June 30, 1914, in cooperation with the U.S. Department of Agriculture, Robert L. Gilliland, Vice-President and Director, Cooperative Extension Service, Utah State University, Logan, Utah.